

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN  
NORTHERN DIVISION

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JAMES STEWART,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 2:22-cv-127

v.

Honorable Maarten Vermaat

CONNIE HORTON et al.,

Defendants.

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**OPINION**

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Plaintiff previously sought and was granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. (ECF No. 6.) Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(c) and Rule 73 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff consented to proceed in all matters in this action under the jurisdiction of a United States magistrate judge. (ECF No. 4.)

This case is presently before the Court for preliminary review under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996) (PLRA), pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court is required to conduct this initial review prior to the service of the complaint. *See In re Prison Litig. Reform Act*, 105 F.3d 1131, 1131, 1134 (6th Cir. 1997); *McGore v. Wigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 604–05 (6th Cir. 1997). Service of the complaint on the named defendants is of particular significance in defining a putative defendant’s relationship to the proceedings.

“An individual or entity named as a defendant is not obliged to engage in litigation unless notified of the action, and brought under a court’s authority, by formal process.” *Murphy Bros. v.*

*Michetti Pipe Stringing, Inc.*, 526 U.S. 344, 347 (1999). “Service of process, under longstanding tradition in our system of justice, is fundamental to any procedural imposition on a named defendant.” *Id.* at 350. “[O]ne becomes a party officially, and is required to take action in that capacity, only upon service of a summons or other authority-asserting measure stating the time within which the party served must appear and defend.” *Id.* (citations omitted). That is, “[u]nless a named defendant agrees to waive service, the summons continues to function as the *sine qua non* directing an individual or entity to participate in a civil action or forgo procedural or substantive rights.” *Id.* at 351. Therefore, the PLRA, by requiring courts to review and even resolve a plaintiff’s claims before service, creates a circumstance where there may only be one party to the proceeding—the plaintiff—at the district court level and on appeal. *See, e.g., Conway v. Fayette Cnty. Gov’t*, 212 F. App’x 418 (6th Cir. 2007) (“Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, the district court screened the complaint and dismissed it without prejudice before service was made upon any of the defendants . . . [such that] . . . only [the plaintiff] [wa]s a party to this appeal.”).

Here, Plaintiff has consented to a United States magistrate judge conducting all proceedings in this case under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c). That statute provides that “[u]pon the consent of the parties, a full-time United States magistrate judge . . . may conduct any or all proceedings . . . and order the entry of judgment in the case . . . .” 28 U.S.C. § 636(c). Because the named Defendants have not yet been served, the undersigned concludes that they are not presently parties whose consent is required to permit the undersigned to conduct a preliminary review under the PLRA, in the same way they are not parties who will be served with or given notice of this opinion. *See Neals v. Norwood*, 59 F.3d 530, 532 (5th Cir. 1995) (“The record does not contain a

consent from the defendants[; h]owever, because they had not been served, they were not parties to the action at the time the magistrate entered judgment.”<sup>1</sup>

Under the PLRA, the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A; 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must read Plaintiff’s *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff’s allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, the Court will dismiss Plaintiff’s complaint for failure to state a claim.

### **Discussion**

#### **I. Factual Allegations**

Plaintiff is presently incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) at the Baraga Correctional Facility (AMF) in Baraga, Baraga County, Michigan. The events about which he complains, however, occurred at the Chippewa Correctional Facility (URF) in Kincheloe, Chippewa County, Michigan. Plaintiff sues Warden Connie Horton and Correctional Officers Unknown Anderson, Unknown Casey, Unknown Schrovenwever, and Johnathan Ware.

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<sup>1</sup> *But see Coleman v. Lab. & Indus. Rev. Comm’n of Wis.*, 860 F.3d 461, 471 (7th Cir. 2017) (concluding that, when determining which parties are required to consent to proceed before a United States magistrate judge under 28 U.S.C. § 636(c), “context matters” and the context the United States Supreme Court considered in *Murphy Bros.* was nothing like the context of a screening dismissal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c)); *Williams v. King*, 875 F.3d 500, 503–04 (9th Cir. 2017) (relying on Black’s Law Dictionary for the definition of “parties” and not addressing *Murphy Bros.*); *Burton v. Schamp*, 25 F.4th 198, 207 n.26 (3d Cir. Feb. 10, 2022) (premising its discussion of “the term ‘parties’ solely in relation to its meaning in Section 636(c)(1), and . . . not tak[ing] an opinion on the meaning of ‘parties’ in other contexts”).

Plaintiff alleges that on an unknown date, he wrote a letter to Defendant Horton concerning lost property. (ECF No. 1, PageID. 2.) Plaintiff received no response to his letter. (*Id.*) He claims that as warden of URF, it is Defendant Horton's responsibility to protect inmates' property. (*Id.*)

Plaintiff alleges further that Defendant Anderson is the officer who signed the "pack up slip that had a lot of property of [Plaintiff's] missing." (*Id.*) Defendant Casey is the officer who took books out of Plaintiff's cell. (*Id.*) According to Plaintiff, video footage would show that this occurred on October 2, 2021. (*Id.*) Plaintiff avers further that Defendant Ware was the officer who shackled Plaintiff when he was "emergency transferred" from URF to AMF. (*Id.*) Plaintiff contends that this placed Defendant Ware "in the [presence] of [his] stolen/lost property." (*Id.*) He alleges further that as a unit officer, Defendant Schrovenwever "had an obligation to protect [Plaintiff's] property[,] which he failed to do." (*Id.*)

Plaintiff asserts that he is missing books that he bought in January of 2021. (*Id.*) He also claims to be missing legal documents, including his presentence investigation report, police report, and transcripts, as well as paperwork pertaining to three lawsuits filed in this Court. (*Id.*) Plaintiff is also missing copies of his grievances and health care kites. (*Id.*) Plaintiff states that he went "2 weeks with no shower shoes, 1 pair of underwear, no socks[,] and only a jumpsuit due to having no property." (*Id.*)

Based on the foregoing, Plaintiff asserts violations of his Fourth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights. (*Id.*) A liberal reading of Plaintiff's complaint also leads the Court to believe that he could be asserting a First Amendment claim for denial of access to the courts. (*Id.*) Plaintiff seeks declaratory relief, injunctive relief in the form of a transfer to a Level 4 facility, and compensatory and punitive damages. (*Id.*, PageID.3.)

## II. Failure To State a Claim

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if it fails “to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff’s allegations must include more than labels and conclusions. *Id.*; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (“Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.”). The court must determine whether the complaint contains “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679. Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a “probability requirement,’ . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Id.* at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged—but it has not ‘show[n]’—that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Id.* at 679 (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2)); *see also Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (holding that the *Twombly/Iqbal* plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Street v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 102 F.3d 810, 814 (6th Cir. 1996). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to

identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

#### **A. First Amendment Access to the Courts Claim**

While Plaintiff does not explicitly raise a First Amendment claim, his allegations concerning lost legal paperwork potentially implicate the First Amendment. The Court, therefore, will consider whether Plaintiff has set forth a plausible First Amendment access to the courts claim.

It is well established that prisoners have a constitutional right of access to the courts. *Bounds v. Smith*, 430 U.S. 817, 821 (1977). The principal issue in *Bounds* was whether the states must protect the right of access to the courts by providing law libraries or alternative sources of legal information for prisoners. *Id.* at 817. The Court further noted that in addition to law libraries or alternative sources of legal knowledge, the states must provide indigent inmates with “paper and pen to draft legal documents, notarial services to authenticate them, and with stamps to mail them.” *Id.* at 824–25. The right of access to the courts also prohibits prison officials from erecting barriers that may impede the inmate’s access to the courts. *See Knop v. Johnson*, 977 F.2d 996, 1009 (6th Cir. 1992).

An indigent prisoner’s constitutional right to legal resources and materials is not, however, without limit. In order to state a viable claim for interference with his access to the courts, a plaintiff must show “actual injury.” *Lewis v. Casey*, 518 U.S. 343, 349 (1996); *see also Talley-Bey v. Knebl*, 168 F.3d 884, 886 (6th Cir. 1999); *Knop*, 977 F.2d at 1000. In other words, a plaintiff must plead and demonstrate that the shortcomings in the prison legal assistance program or lack of legal materials have hindered, or are presently hindering, his efforts to pursue a nonfrivolous legal claim. *Lewis*, 518 U.S. at 351–53; *see also Pilgrim v. Littlefield*, 92 F.3d 413, 416 (6th Cir. 1996). The Supreme Court has strictly limited the types of cases for which there may be an actual injury:

*Bounds* does not guarantee inmates the wherewithal to transform themselves into litigating engines capable of filing everything from shareholder derivative actions to slip-and-fall claims. The tools it requires to be provided are those that the inmates need in order to attack their sentences, directly or collaterally, and in order to challenge the conditions of their confinement. Impairment of any other litigating capacity is simply one of the incidental (and perfectly constitutional) consequences of conviction and incarceration.

*Lewis*, 518 U.S. at 355. “Thus, a prisoner’s right to access the courts extends to direct appeals, habeas corpus applications, and civil rights claims only.” *Thaddeus-X v. Blatter*, 175 F.3d 378, 391 (6th Cir. 1999) (en banc). Moreover, the underlying action must have asserted a non-frivolous claim. *Lewis*, 518 U.S. at 353; accord *Hadix v. Johnson*, 182 F.3d 400, 405 (6th Cir. 1999) (*Lewis* changed actual injury to include requirement that action be non-frivolous).

In addition, the Supreme Court squarely has held that “the underlying cause of action . . . is an element that must be described in the complaint, just as much as allegations must describe the official acts frustrating the litigation.” *Christopher v. Harbury*, 536 U.S. 403, 415 (2002) (citing *Lewis*, 518 U.S. at 353 & n.3). “Like any other element of an access claim, the underlying cause of action and its lost remedy must be addressed by allegations in the complaint sufficient to give fair notice to a defendant.” *Id.* at 415.

In his complaint, Plaintiff vaguely states that he lost his presentence investigation report, police report, and transcripts. (ECF No. 1, PageID.2.) Presumably, these documents related to Plaintiff’s criminal proceedings. Nothing in the complaint, however, suggests that Plaintiff’s ability to pursue a direct appeal or habeas corpus application was frustrated by the loss of these documents.

Plaintiff also suggests that he lost grievances and health care kites, as well as paperwork relating to three suits filed in this Court: 2:20-cv-237, 2:21-cv-101, and 2:21-cv-200. (*Id.*) A review of the docket for *Stewart v. Horton*, 2:20-cv-237, reveals that the matter was dismissed on June 16, 2021, following settlement under the Prisoner Early Mediation Program. Order, *Stewart v.*

*Horton*, 2:20-cv-237 (W.D. Mich.) (ECF No. 15). Plaintiff's remaining claims in *Stewart v. Rush*, No. 2:21-cv-101, have been referred to the Prisoner Early Mediation Program, and a conference concerning mediation is scheduled for August 24, 2022. Order, *Stewart v. Rush*, No. 2:21-cv-101 (W.D. Mich.) (ECF No. 16). Likewise, Plaintiff's remaining claims in *Stewart v. Montie*, No. 2:21-cv-200, have been referred to the Prisoner Early Mediation Program, and a conference concerning mediation is scheduled for August 10, 2022. Order, *Stewart v. Montie*, No. 2:21-cv-200 (W.D. Mich.) (ECF No. 15). Plaintiff's complaint is simply devoid of facts suggesting that the loss of his paperwork has impeded his ability to pursue his claims in these matters in any way. Accordingly, any First Amendment access to the courts claims will be dismissed.

#### **B. Fourth Amendment Claims**

Plaintiff contends that Defendants violated his Fourth Amendment rights through their involvement in the loss of his property. (ECF No. 1, PageID.2.)

In *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517 (1984), the Supreme Court considered and rejected a Fourth Amendment claim based upon a prison official searching a prisoner's cell and destroying some of his legal papers in the process. *Id.* at 519, 535. The prisoner claimed that the prison official's conduct constituted an unreasonable search and seizure of his property, in violation of the Fourth Amendment. *Id.* at 530. The Court disagreed.

First, the Court recognized that while prisoners are not beyond the reach of the Constitution, "curtailment of certain rights is necessary, as a practical matter, to accommodate a 'myriad of institutional needs and objectives' of prison facilities, . . . chief among which is internal security." *Id.* at 523–24 (internal citation omitted). The Court then determined that the official's search of the prisoner's cell did not violate the Fourth Amendment because "society is not prepared to recognize as legitimate any subjective expectation of privacy that a prisoner might have in his prison cell." *Id.* at 526. According to the Court, "[a] right of privacy in traditional Fourth



Amendment terms is fundamentally incompatible with the close and continual surveillance of inmates and their cells required to ensure institutional security and internal order.” *Id.* at 527–28. For similar reasons, the Court held that the Fourth Amendment “does not protect against seizures in a prison cell.” *Id.* at 528 n.8.

Like in *Hudson*, Plaintiff simply has no expectation of or right to privacy in his prison cell. The Court, therefore, will dismiss Plaintiff’s claims asserting that Defendants’ actions violated his Fourth Amendment rights.

### **C. Eighth Amendment Claims**

Plaintiff also contends that Defendants violated his Eighth Amendment rights, referencing “unsafe conditions.” (ECF No. 1, PageID.2.) He suggests that the loss of his property constituted cruel and unusual punishment. (*Id.*) He also appears to suggest that his Eighth Amendment rights were violated because he “went 2 weeks with no shower shoes, 1 pair of underwear, no socks and only a jumpsuit due to having no property.” (*Id.*)

The Eighth Amendment imposes a constitutional limitation on the power of the states to punish those convicted of crimes. Punishment may not be “barbarous,” nor may it contravene society’s “evolving standards of decency.” *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 345–46 (1981). The Amendment, therefore, prohibits conduct by prison officials that involves the “unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain.” *Ivey v. Wilson*, 832 F.2d 950, 954 (6th Cir. 1987) (per curiam) (quoting *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 346). The deprivation alleged must result in the denial of the “minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities.” *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 347; *see also Wilson v. Yaklich*, 148 F.3d 596, 600–01 (6th Cir. 1998). The Eighth Amendment is only concerned with “deprivations of essential food, medical care, or sanitation” or “other conditions intolerable for prison confinement.” *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 348 (citation omitted). Moreover, “[n]ot every unpleasant experience a prisoner might endure while incarcerated constitutes cruel and unusual punishment

within the meaning of the Eighth Amendment.” *Ivey*, 832 F.2d at 954. “Routine discomfort is ‘part of the penalty that criminal offenders pay for their offenses against society.’” *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 9 (1992) (quoting *Rhodes*, 452 U.S. at 347). As a consequence, “extreme deprivations are required to make out a conditions-of-confinement claim.” *Id.*

In order for a prisoner to prevail on an Eighth Amendment claim, he must show that he faced a sufficiently serious risk to his health or safety and that the defendant official acted with “‘deliberate indifference’ to [his] health or safety.” *Mingus v. Butler*, 591 F.3d 474, 479–80 (6th Cir. 2010) (citing *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994) (applying deliberate indifference standard to medical claims)); *see also Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. 25, 35 (1993) (applying deliberate indifference standard to conditions of confinement claims)). The deliberate-indifference standard includes both objective and subjective components. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *Helling*, 509 U.S. at 35–37. To satisfy the objective prong, an inmate must show “that he is incarcerated under conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm.” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834. Under the subjective prong, an official must “know[] of and disregard[] an excessive risk to inmate health or safety.” *Id.* at 837. “[I]t is enough that the official acted or failed to act despite his knowledge of a substantial risk of serious harm.” *Id.* at 842. “It is, indeed, fair to say that acting or failing to act with deliberate indifference to a substantial risk of serious harm to a prisoner is the equivalent of recklessly disregarding that risk.” *Id.* at 836. “[P]rison officials who actually knew of a substantial risk to inmate health or safety may be found free from liability if they responded reasonably to the risk, even if the harm ultimately was not averted.” *Id.* at 844.

Plaintiff fails to allege any facts to suggest that the deprivations complained of—the lack of shower shoes, additional underwear, socks, and more than a jumpsuit for two weeks—were anything other than temporary inconveniences, and allegations about temporary inconveniences

do not show that the conditions fell beneath the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities as measured by a contemporary standard of decency. *Dellis v. Corr. Corp. of Am.*, 257 F.3d 508, 511 (6th Cir. 2001); *see also J.P. v. Taft*, 439 F. Supp. 2d 793, 811 (S.D. Ohio 2006) (“[M]inor inconveniences resulting from the difficulties in administering a large detention facility do not give rise to a constitutional claim.” (internal quotation marks omitted)); *see also Jackson v. Powell*, No. 1:18-cv-466, 2018 WL 3722158, at \*8 (W.D. Mich. Aug. 6, 2018) (“Plaintiff’s alleged temporary deprivations of hygiene items, exercise yard, and laundry service amount to minor inconveniences that do not rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation.”). Moreover, Plaintiff’s allegations concerning his lost property and violations of his due process rights with respect to such do not implicate the Eighth Amendment. Plaintiff’s Eighth Amendment claims will, therefore, be dismissed.

#### **D. Fourteenth Amendment Claims**

Plaintiff contends further that Defendants violated his Fourteenth Amendment rights by taking his property without due process. (ECF No. 1, PageID.2.) Plaintiff’s claim, however, is barred by the doctrine of *Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527 (1981), *overruled in part by Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327 (1986). Under *Parratt*, a person deprived of property by a “random and unauthorized act” of a state employee has no federal due process claim unless the state fails to afford an adequate post-deprivation remedy. If an adequate post-deprivation remedy exists, the deprivation, although real, is not “without due process of law.” *Parratt*, 451 U.S. at 537. This rule applies to both negligent and intentional deprivations of property, as long as the deprivation was not done pursuant to an established state procedure. *See Hudson*, 468 U.S. at 530–36. Because Plaintiff’s claim is premised upon allegedly unauthorized acts of a state official, he must plead and prove the inadequacy of state post-deprivation remedies. *See Copeland v. Machulis*, 57 F.3d 476, 479–80 (6th Cir. 1995); *Gibbs v. Hopkins*, 10 F.3d 373, 378 (6th Cir. 1993). Under settled Sixth

Circuit authority, a prisoner's failure to sustain this burden requires dismissal of his § 1983 due-process action. *See Brooks v. Dutton*, 751 F.2d 197 (6th Cir. 1985).

Plaintiff has not sustained his burden in this case. Plaintiff has not alleged that state post-deprivation remedies are inadequate. Moreover, numerous state post-deprivation remedies are available to him. First, a prisoner who incurs a loss through no fault of his own may petition the institution's Prisoner Benefit Fund for compensation. Mich. Dep't of Corr., Policy Directive 04.07.112, ¶ B (eff. Apr. 26, 2021). Aggrieved prisoners may also submit claims for property loss of less than \$1,000 to the State Administrative Board. Mich. Comp. Laws § 600.6419; MDOC Policy Directive 03.02.131 (eff. Mar. 27, 2017). Alternatively, Michigan law authorizes actions in the Court of Claims asserting tort or contract claims "against the state and any of its departments or officers." Mich. Comp. Laws § 600.6419(1)(a). The Sixth Circuit specifically has held that Michigan provides adequate post-deprivation remedies for deprivation of property. *See Copeland*, 57 F.3d at 480. Plaintiff does not allege any reason why a state-court action would not afford him complete relief for the deprivation, either negligent or intentional, of his personal property. Accordingly, Plaintiff's due process claims are properly dismissed.

### **Conclusion**

Having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff's complaint will be dismissed for failure to state a claim, under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b), and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). Although the Court concludes that Plaintiff's claims are properly dismissed, the Court does not conclude that any issue Plaintiff might raise on appeal would be frivolous. *Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). Accordingly, the Court does not certify that an appeal would not be taken in good faith. Should

Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$505.00 appellate filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), *see McGore*, 114 F.3d at 610-11, unless Plaintiff is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis*, *e.g.*, by the “three-strikes” rule of § 1915(g). If he is barred, he will be required to pay the \$505.00 appellate filing fee in one lump sum.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A judgment consistent with this opinion will be entered.

Dated: August 11, 2022

/s/ *Maarten Vermaat*

Maarten Vermaat  
United States Magistrate Judge